

Social Media: A New Tool for Peacebuilding in Italy

COMMUNICATION | EDITORIAL | INVITED CONTRIBUTION | PERSPECTIVE | REPORT | **REVIEW**

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence against women, defined as the systematic harm inflicted on individuals and/or groups based on gender, persists in modern-day Italy. I find that current discussions and policies to mitigate gender-based violence neglect a fundamental direction: prevention. Experts and policymakers specializing in the issue widely neglect a cultural assessment to explore why gender-based violence persists in order to address these deeper roots. Accordingly, I explore the ways that the Italian media is complicit in reproducing a culture of violence. This review considers one tool that remains largely overlooked within the project to ameliorate violence: social media. Current opinions on social media are largely dominated by its negative implications. In contrast, my research sheds an optimistic light on social media by exposing how certain projects on Instagram address and challenge gender-based violence. Two projects in particular convey the point: *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freedra*. Through a content analysis of the images and videos shared on the projects, I illustrate how they serve as unique resources for policy, and use their work as a basis for recommendations to policymakers to promote the social development necessary to counter a culture of gender-based violence. The projects disrupt traditional patterns of cultural formation and help to build a more holistic citizenship, especially for marginalized groups, in ways that merit greater attention particularly from politicians and academics.

Introduction

Italy was among the 34 European countries to sign the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on 11 May 2011. The convention aims to prevent violence against women, protect its victims and prosecute perpetrators. Accordingly,

the structure of the convention is based on 'four Ps': prevention, protection, prosecution, and integrated policies [1]. Pursuant to the Istanbul Convention's terms, the Italian government has taken increased action to address the systematic harm inflicted on individuals and/or groups based on gender, known as gender-based or gendered

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violence, in Italy. Several legislative reforms, including the recent Law No. 69 of 19 July 2019 (known as the Red Code), have led to the development of a legislative framework in line with the requirements of the convention on the civil and criminal law remedies for victims of violence [2]. Notwithstanding the increased measures, however, these have disproportionately focused on prosecution; while the prosecution of perpetrators of violence is fundamental, one of the most important clauses, prevention, is dramatically neglected. Data from one of the most recent analyses of the implementation of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention illustrates this discrepancy. The report was published on January 2020 by the Group on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the state parties. Among the most significant legislative gaps the expert group found in Italy was the failure of the government to take adequate preventative or protective measures [3]. Scholars investigating gendered violence in Italy have also followed this trend: documenting the violence itself and the punishment of violence often takes precedence over assessing why violence persists in order to address these deeper cultural roots.

Although there has been a considerable increase in academic publications on gendered violence in recent years, the studies prevalently lack an analytical narrative on violence; the dominant focus lies in merely describing the character and conditions of violence [4–9]. Many, for example, describe the issue from a medical perspective [4, 10–15]. A limited pool of literature has been published which questions why gendered violence remains, and what is being done to address this issue [16–19]. My research builds on these studies. In this article I find that one of the abiding institutions disseminating and reinforcing a culture of gender-based violence is the Italian media—in particular, RAI, Mediaset, Corriere della Sera, and La Repubblica. Peace and conflict theory scholars, notably, David P. Baradash and Charles P. Webel suggest that a greater emphasis on cultural violence and the institutions sustaining the culture is necessary for the sustainable prevention of gendered violence, considered as “peacebuilding” [20].

The peacebuilding process in Italy is well underway in a vastly undervalued area: social media. On the social network Instagram, certain feminist projects are building platforms of gender consciousness that attempt to combat a culture of gendered violence. Figure 1 shows screenshots taken from two such projects: *Freedra* and *Il meglio delle donne* (‘The Best of Women’). The projects develop a counterculture with significant implications for the alleviation of gendered violence in Italy. *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freedra* are addressing one of the underlying limitations of Italian policy work against gendered violence: the prioritization of prosecution over prevention.

Cultural Roots of Gender Violence in Italy

Can we talk about violence when
nobody is committing direct violence?

Johan Galtung [21]

Johan Galtung posed the question more than five decades ago in his seminal work ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’ [21]. In the article, Galtung suggests that sustainable peacebuilding can only progress with more intricate understandings of ‘violence’, which he divides into three core components: direct, structural, and cultural (Figure 2).

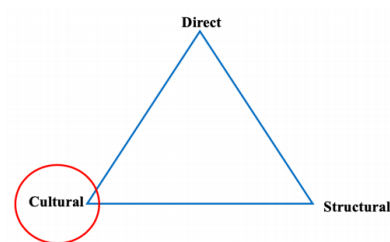


Figure 2: Galtung’s representation of violence. Adapted from [21].

At the upmost tip is the direct manifestation, a personal injustice likely traceable to concrete subjects. In contrast, structural violence is an indirect process of exploitation and marginalization felt by entire communities. Incorporated among the deeper layer of the triangle is cultural violence, the process through which violence comes to be seen as natural and legitimate. Comparing

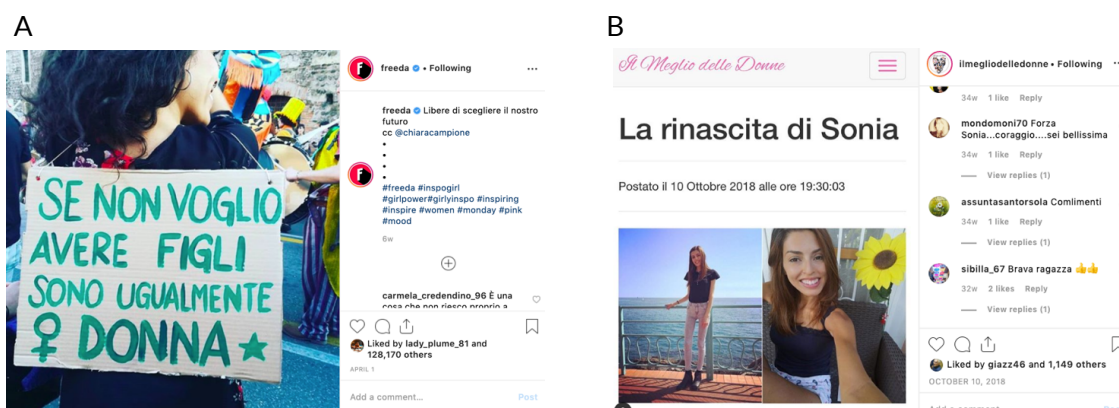


Figure 1: A) is a photograph from *Freeda* of a woman whose back reads: 'I am still a woman if I don't want children.' B) is a picture on *Il meglio delle donne* from an interview with Sonia, a woman who shared her story battling anorexia.

the concept to the other two layers of violence, Galtung states: 'it does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into social structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both' [22]. Peace theory scholars today observe that a recurring limitation of the peace process is the tendency to focus exclusively on the upmost tip [20]. Italy is one such case. Despite the increase in research on gender-based violence, the publications seldom call to attention the institutions inciting the upmost manifestation of violence. One critical site sustaining cultural violence in Italy is the media: the media industry in Italy is a prominent agent of socialization pivotal in sustaining unequal gender relations [23].

Cultural Violence in the Italian Media

Over the last two decades, extensive literature has been published exposing how Italian media legitimizes a culture of violence against women [24–27]. Echoing these studies, foreign news outlets have also begun to document the poor and relatively unchecked female representation in Italian media [28]. A view shared among the publications is that the television industry in particular has constructed and legitimized unequal gender hierarchies. Despite the fact that 60% of television viewers in Italy are women, scholars note that the dominant images have been produced by and for the traditional male gaze, whereby women are

depicted from a heterosexual, masculine perspective that presents them as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer [29, 30]. As a result, the mainstream symbolic landscape in Italian television is dominated by homogenous images of fragmented, white, youthful, and mute female bodies. This restricted set of images, or rather, as sociologist Patricia Hill Collins refers to them, 'controlling images,' reproduce and justify unjust hierarchies across numerous categories, including gender [31].

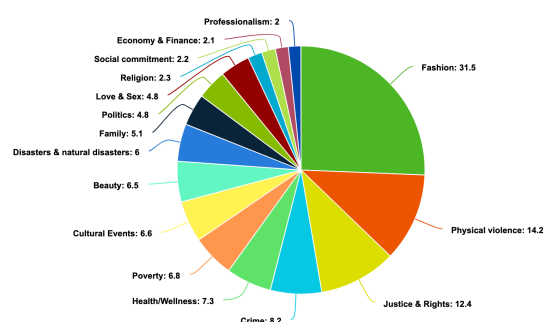


Figure 3: Content analysis of the representation of women in Italian media in 2006. Source: [32]. The top 10 and other representative themes are shown. The sum is larger than 100% because more themes were allowed per data point.

Data from international reports specific to the Italian context such as the 2011 UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) shadow report corroborates observations in the literature [33]. Citing a 2006 survey from Italian research institute Censis, Rashida Manjoo, the United Nations Special Rap-

porteur on violence against women, reported that in 2006 53% of women appearing on Italian television did not speak [34]. The 2006 Censis survey also reflects the homogenous and highly stereotyped associations of women in Italian television: more than 45% of associations were with issues such as sex, family, fashion and beauty and less than 10% were with issues of social commitment and professionalism (Figure 3).

The trends observed in Italian media reflects those documented in major news outlets globally; at the time of the Censis survey (2005-2006), the Global Media Monitoring project collected data from major news outlets around the world and reported that women are dramatically under-represented in the news, with only about one-fifth of news subjects being female (the topic of the news stories or interviewees). There was no single news topic in which women outnumbered men as newsmakers: only 14% of political stories were on women and 20% of business news focused on women. However, women are dominant in the media as celebrities (42%) and royalty (33%). In 2010, the survey reported that only 13% of all stories focus specifically on women; 46% of all stories reinforce gender stereotypes; politics featured 19% women and figures for business stories remained unchanged in 2010 [35].

Almost a decade later, gender-specific data and statistics highlight a similar phenomenon. According to a 2018 UNESCO survey on women in media, women are the focus of only 10% of news stories, comprise just 20% of experts or spokespeople interviewed, and a mere 4% of news stories are deemed to challenge gender stereotypes [36]. The statistics emphasize that a critical issue is not just the lack of representation, but also the quality of representation; when women appear in articles on these platforms, they are primarily associated with the private sphere and framed with a 'less serious' tone than male counterparts. Reproducing the classification of women through their traditional roles legitimizes their associated status of inferiority, thereby normalizing unequal power relations, a dynamic foundational to justifying direct acts of violence. Through my research, I observed that the power imbalance is entrenched not merely in the content but also in the structure of the newspapers. The newspaper

Corriere della Sera (henceforth, *Corriere*) offers an example.

Corriere is one of Italy's oldest and most respected daily papers, first published in 1876. The online version is a popular Italian-language website, attracting more than 1.6 million readers daily; it is the thirteenth most visited website in Italy [37]. Since 1996, *Corriere* has included a weekly women's magazine supplement *IoDonna*, 'I Woman.' The *Corriere* website contains a permanent version of *IoDonna*. The online *IoDonna* supplement can be found towards the end of the menu. The placement of the section 'for women' at the bottom of the menu immediately establishes a subtle social hierarchy, where the hard news sections occupy the topmost levels. In the absence of a counterpart 'male section,' a subtle message is conveyed that the more serious sections including politics and economy are 'masculine territories.' Adding further weight to this message is the structure of *IoDonna*.

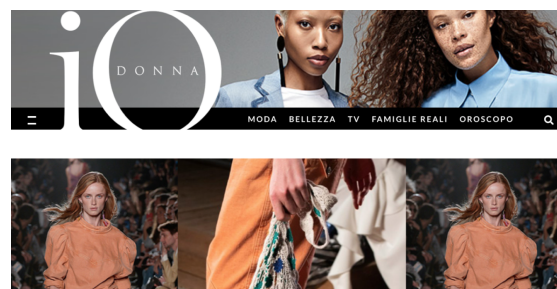


Figure 4: April 2020 Menu of the *IoDonna* section, described on the newspaper's website as the 'feminine of *Corriere*.'

The section is divided into five categories, each representing a topic stereotypically associated with women: fashion, beauty, TV gossip, royal families (substituting a former 'love and sex' section), and astrology (Figure 4). Why do the topics belong to the women's section? Why not include 'Sex and Love' alongside politics and economy in *Corriere*'s main menu? While it may be argued that the sections' inclusion was decided upon from what was popular with *Corriere*'s female audience, it is also well documented that the media play a part in creating such demand [38, 39]. In reinforcing the traditional ideals of femininity, *Corriere* helps perpetuate cultural norms that legitimize gender-based violence.

Although the government does recognize that deeply rooted gender stereotypes in Italy are a persistent obstacle to women's empowerment and equal opportunity, there has yet to be adequate national action by policymakers to address the issue. Accordingly, the CEDAW Shadow Report for Italy states:

Since 2005 no will to try to modify the stereotyped image of women in the media has been noticed. The political debate has contributed to a decline in this sense through frequent sexual references and stereotyped expressions on the role of women in society [33].

The report also documents that the Italian government currently does not have comprehensive policy to address the way in which the media industry reproduces discriminatory cultural norms [33]. However, there are extensive initiatives pursuing this work outside official institutions and one underexplored area where such efforts are underway is social media, specifically, on the platform Instagram. Certain feminist projects have emerged on social media whose unique work bolsters policy recommendations to address the ongoing institutional limitations with regards to gender equality and women's rights.

Recommendation I

Italian government institutions should mandate surveys for the Italian public on social media, focusing on the mental health benefits of engaging with social media platforms that are more inclusive in representation and information than traditional media.

The lack of diversity in the media spans from the decision makers within the institution, such as male-dominated editorial boards and top broadcast executives, to the actual content put forth, as illustrated in previous sections. Opening these positions of power to a more diverse pool of individuals across gender, race, sexuality and general socioeconomic backgrounds is essential in the endeavor to mitigate discrimination and violence,

including gendered violence, in Italy. A greater representation of marginalized groups within the structure of the media would, in turn, increase the diversity of its content, thereby disrupting the homogeneity of the images in the mainstream symbolic landscape which are, in turn, necessary to justify gendered violence.

Diversification in structure and content reportedly benefits individual and collective well-being; while such data has yet to be collected in Italy, examples outside the country offer valuable insights such as a 2019 survey in the UK. Despite negative aspects of social media use which must be addressed but are outside the scope of this review, the data collected indicates that there are notable positive health benefits to social media use, particularly as a means of self-expression, identity, community building, and awareness of others (Figure 5) [40].

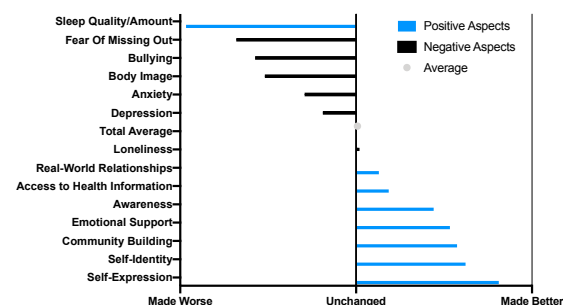


Figure 5: Social media as a tool to improve personal health. Data derived from [40] as an average of scores across five social media (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter).

The latest global data reveals that more than 4.5 billion people have access to the internet, while social media users have passed 3.8 billion-and estimates are that more than half of the world's total population will use social media by mid-2020 [41]. With the exponential growth of social media use around the world, it behooves the Italian government to follow the UK's example and invest greater resources in understanding social media, focusing in particular on the individual and collective mental health effects, so as to find ways to promote healthier participation online. Several projects exist on social media whose work aims to influence social well-being in Italy for the better, and as a successive step, the government should identify and collaborate with them. Two such projects are *Il meglio delle donne* and

Freeda. Their goal is social progress through greater inclusivity and diversity in representation and information, specifically of women. As such, the projects stand as excellent case studies for policymakers who wish to learn of more creative and innovative outlets of social change outside of traditional Italian institutions.

Il meglio delle donne and *Freeda* offer digital spaces that promote a form of community building and self-identity unique to the Italian media landscape: one grounded in diversity and inclusivity. The projects displace homogenous visualizations of Italian women, namely, as cis, feminine, white, able-bodied, and heterosexual individuals. This quality renders the implications of their work fundamental; negotiating more expansive identities is correlated to stronger mental and physical well-being, a correlation shown in Figure 5. One of the ways in which the projects negotiate identity is through storytelling, an act widely recognized to hold emancipatory qualities for both subject and reader [42].

Storytelling is a foundational component of *Il meglio delle donne*. Through her posts, the founder of the project, Francesca, shares stories and interviews of individuals who are, for the most part, female-identifying, which offer valuable and inspirational lessons to her audience.² The messages these stories communicate fall into three main topics: body positivity, resilience, and diversity. Accordingly, Francesca states:

My idea was to exalt as much as possible the female figure, as she is often seen depicted with a weak image. I am trying to show the unfounded nature of this perspective and instead how we are a fundamental part of society. [43]

Francesca's project counter dominant and narrow visualizations of 'woman' by emphasizing the success of Italian women and, equally significant, the vast array of ways this quality can be expressed and achieved. Exemplary is the story of Ilaria Bidini (Figure 6A).

From an early age, Bidini lived with a disabling pathology and received significant bullying as a

result of the impairment. In the comments on Bidini, on the righthand side of the photograph, Francesca emphasizes that despite the extensive framing of her physical state as a 'weakness,' she was able to demonstrate strength; 'After years of humiliation, Ilaria decided to give a moral slap in the face to all and got a degree in education studies with a thesis entitled "Fighting Bullying" [...] Let's defeat the barriers we erect with stereotypes [...] we want to encourage her to continue fighting' [44]. Through her comment, Francesca attempted to undermine the stereotypes associated with disabilities and negotiate an expanded conception of strength. The positive frame Francesca emphasized on Ilaria's story of difficulty and difference was well-received by her audience; Ilaria's story provoked 62 comments, all of which were positive and encouraging messages of support. Although Francesca had previously shared stories on resilience, these were predominantly associated with celebrities but Ilaria's story marked a drastic and well-received shift in Francesca's project towards positive representations of diversity and body-image of everyday women.

Freeda uses social media with a similar end to *Il meglio delle donne*. As with *Il meglio delle donne*, the majority of subjects on *Freeda* are significantly underrepresented in mainstream media, and ones that face a higher risk of discrimination and violence as a result of living at the intersections of other marginalized identities, such as immigrants, people of color, and people with disabilities [46]. The story of Luca Trapanese exemplifies the point, particularly on the topic of parenthood (Figure 6B) [45]. In the dominant register of representation of traditional media, parenthood is conceived as a feminine topic. Major newspapers including *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* have a subsection within the women's section dedicated to 'family.' Further, from a content analysis of 32 images of 'parents' and 'family' between 2017 and 2018 from the two newspapers, I found that all of the images consist of a stereotyped and narrow depiction of family as a heterosexual partnership between a male and female, and where the topic of 'parenthood' is intrinsically associated with 'motherhood'; no images in the articles gave visibility to 'fatherhood', thus

²Francesca's surname has been omitted to preserve her anonymity.



Figure 6: A) Ilaria Bidini from 'Il meglio delle donne' [44] and B) Luca Trapanese from *Freeda* [45].

portraying a very narrow conception of parenthood. The narrative of Trapanese helps challenge these constructions of masculinity and femininity. In his video-interview, Trapanese presents himself as a queer and single father: 'My name is Luca, and I am a father' (Figure 6B) [45]. This establishes an immediate contrast to the presentation of men on traditional media outlets, where they are typically presented first and foremost through their business and professional identities; seldom, if ever, do their domestic roles take precedence. The interview exposes one of the ways *Freeda* is negotiating more expansive identities.

Neither *Il meglio delle donne* nor *Freeda* is self-defined as a 'peace project', working towards mitigating gendered violence in Italy. The implications of their interventions, however, yield them this quality. Displacing dominant images through storytelling works towards peacebuilding as it disrupts the traditional classification schema necessary to justify gendered violence. Indeed, both projects work towards imperceptibility; they stress that there is no one way of being an Italian woman, and no single definition of success, beauty or resilience. The ambiguity of the projects thus challenges the homogeneity of the social hierarchies deeply rooted in the mainstream symbolic landscape which are, in turn, necessary to justify gendered violence.

At present, there is no measurable data to quantify the influence of *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freeda* in mitigating gendered violence. However, if Italian government institutions were to mandate surveys for the Italian public actively engaging with their projects, focusing on the men-

tal health effects of their engagement overtime, the data would help measure the impact of their peacebuilding. As with the UK's survey, important variables to consider in such an assessment are self-expression, identity, community building, and awareness of others; all factors which, if strengthened, expand one's social openness and acceptance, thus minimizing the likelihood of discrimination and violence. The projects would, in this way, inform policy by providing data on how to best encourage the social and psychological development necessary to mitigate gendered violence. Specifically, data on the impactful content of the projects—the content with highest engagement rate including views and comments—focused on the themes of diversity and inclusion would help policymakers understand how to diversify their own communication campaigns, thus helping them build more effective frameworks through which to engage with youth.

Recommendation II

Encourage youth to engage with social media platforms that offer resources on information marginalized in traditional Italian curriculums such as sexual health and women's rights.

The contemporary state of official institutions of social formation, namely, schools and the media, impedes younger generations from developing a critical consciousness on topics integral to countering a culture of gendered violence such as sexual health and women's rights. On social media, how-

ever, projects such as *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freedda* are building archives on these materials and promoting discussions around them. The significant following of the projects indicates a strong and growing desire across Italy to engage with this content; in January 2020, *Freedda* was ranked the second most popular media on social networks in Italy with a total of 13,8 Million interactions, and *Il meglio delle donne* has attracted over 50,000 followers including well-known thought leaders in human rights such as Rula Jebreal [47].

Il meglio delle donne's page is creating a digitally permanent educational space on the topic of feminicides, where typically a woman or girl is murdered by a man on account of her gender. This is one of Italy's most pressing human rights issues: Italy has one of the highest femicide rates in Europe, with 123 women murdered in 2017, according to the National Institute of Statistics in Italy [49]. Francesca shares posts on a multitude of issues but her central goal is consciousness raising on femicide. Through this focus, her project is becoming a permanent archival space of resources and dialogue on the topic. News of femicides retains a constant visibility on *Il meglio delle donne*, as exemplified in Figure 7A. The content on femicide that Francesca publishes varies from pictures of victims with brief summaries of their murders, to articles originally published on news sources such as *Corriere*. While the lifespan on the front pages of newspapers of the articles and discussions related to femicides is predictably fleeting, on Francesca's page the articles occupy a permanent and easily visible position in the makeup of her page thanks to the Instagram mosaic format.

Freedda is building a body of resources on a range of topics neglected in the mainstream media and educational landscapes; among these themes is that of sexual health. Sex education is a resource pervasively marginalized in Italian schools; Italy is one of the few countries in Europe where sex education is not mandatory, and this absence helps fuel a culture of gender-based violence [50]. One of the reasons behind the correlation is that the absence of sexual health education typically leads youth to rely on alternative resources, such as pornography, which scholars note increase the likelihood of violent behavior, especially in young boys, as it portrays imbalanced sexual relations where the focus shifts almost exclusively towards

male pleasure [51]. The imbalanced focus on male pleasure perpetuates a dynamic central to a culture of gendered violence: women's constructed dependency on men for pleasure. Feminists across Italy have written directly to the Italian government on the correlation between depriving youth of sexual health courses, and gender-based violence. In an open letter from 2016, campaigners from the Italian feminist association 'F Come' write:

An unmistakable link exists between gender-based violence and a lack of effective education policies. Too many women suffer violence at the hands of their partners or acquaintances, without the knowledge that their experiences qualify as abuse. Furthermore, the collective imagination too often believes the stereotype that rapists and abusers are solely strangers who are encountered casually in public spaces [52].

The letter included the support of representatives from multiple organizations and professionals from the legal, education, and medical fields. The authors illustrate that comprehensive sex education is fundamental to combatting behaviors typically associated with a culture favorable to gender-based violence, such as sexual stereotypes of masculinity or narrow conceptions of sexual pleasure. *Freedda* provides resources to help disrupt the informational void on sex education in schools and mainstream media. Specifically, *Freedda* has drawn significant attention to the topic of women's sexual and reproductive health.

In a cartoon video on female pleasure, for example, the authors underscore the need to break the taboo of female masturbation. The image on Figure 7B captures the opening lines of the video. The text reads: 'Female autoeroticism is still a taboo, but women also masturbate. And rightly so! But why?' They introduce the need to break the silence on the topic with lighthearted and simple language. Later, the video illustrates how masturbation can have significant health benefits, emphasizing that the chemical reaction can bolster emotional and mental health by alleviat-



Figure 7: A) Mosaic format of *Il meglio delle donne* main page. In the center of the page, there is a photograph of an article from January 2019 which reads: ‘Brought to Italy and then killed: the slaves of organ trafficking. B) *Freeda*’s cartoon video ‘Even women masturbate’ on the topic of female autoeroticism [48].

ing tension, increasing happiness, and improving sexual relations. In just under forty seconds, the *Freeda* video provides a comprehensive overview of an issue pervasively missing in Italian schools but one that challenges the widescale social norm that women are dependent on men for sexual pleasure.

Projects such as *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freeda* allocate a visual centrality to sexual health and women’s rights. Together, these qualities render the projects valuable and well-respected platforms executing preventative work against the cultural roots of gender-based violence. As such, it behooves policymakers to encourage youth to engage more with these and other social media platforms whose content proves highly educational on topics not covered on a national scale in Italian schools such as sexual health. Policymakers can undertake this action by inviting teachers to complement their courses with content from social media; more than half of Italy’s youth has access to a smartphone, which, rather than be dismissed entirely in classroom settings, should be ascribed more importance and acceptance. Opening schools to smartphones and social media also opens the possibility of introducing informational materials not offered on a national scale, such as sexual health, yet valuable to offer all students. Data from a recent UK study from charitable organisation ‘The Female Lead’ serves as a unique case study on the benefits of helping youth embrace social media as an educational and empowering tool. The study, called ‘Disrupting

the Feed’, assessed 28 teenage girls’ relationship to social media before and after being instructed to follow specific accounts with a strong focus on empowerment and women’s rights. Over the course of one year, the study found that introducing social media in a more formal setting, along with a curriculum to guide the student’s engagement online towards more educational content on women’s rights and other topics marginalized in traditional schooling, was a transformative experience for the girls:

Offering teens a diverse range of female role models to follow outside of the typical celebrity profiles and those of their friends, transformed their view of what social media could be used for and gave them ‘a completely different outlook’. At the end of the study, girls were far more likely to see social media as both for entertainment and for ‘education and learning’ [53].

The project’s success has received extensive recognition from reporters and will soon expand out to youth in schools across the UK [54]. Although the main focus of the UK study was ‘inspiring female role models’, Italian policymakers might consider supporting a similar study in Italy where the main focus might be sexual health, and women’s rights.

Recommendation III

Use social media platforms to promote dialogue between citizens and policymakers

The peacebuilding process that *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freedra* promote has important implications for the strength of democracy and policymaking in Italy. The resources, conversations, and community building the projects offer render them disruptive platforms which are valuable in strengthening one of democracy's fundamental pillars: citizenship.

Citizenship is more than a question of inclusion; formal legal equality is only a first step in the process of constructing citizenship. Once legal rights are attained, it is equally necessary to ensure access to power, representation and equal participation; yet this step is often neglected, thus perpetuating the pre-existing status of marginalized communities but in more subtle ways. This is well documented in the case of women. For decades, feminist theorists have observed that relative to men, women's citizenship is still contingent on their traditional roles in the domestic sphere, especially as wives and mothers [55–57]. The phenomenon stems largely from the conflation of women's legal equality to their holistic emancipation, see reference [58] for more details. A process of deconstruction and reconstruction is imperative to work towards emancipation so that they are treated as 'full members.' When this phase of constructing female citizenship is not pursued, their previous 'identification with the private and familial sphere' persists and women remain partial citizens. The phenomenon is especially evident in Italy. Contemporary sites of citizen formation in Italy such as the media and schools have yet to recognize their complicity in perpetuating traditional gender hierarchies. As a result, these institutions continue to reproduce a narrow conception of women's citizenship; women's image has remained depicted through their relation to male counterparts. Notwithstanding the current conditions, various tools exist that are contributing to challenge Italian women's partial citizenship; social media being an example used in this review. Social media can function as a modern tool not only to challenge, but also to expand and reconstruct female citizen-

ship. *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freedra* illustrate this; the projects disrupt traditional constructions of citizenship by providing spaces of alternative social formation. The projects encourage an expansion of female citizenship by negotiating more diverse identities, providing resources on marginalized information and encouraging conversations on these topics. Thus, the projects strengthen three core components of citizenship: representation, participation, and access to information [56]. As such, the projects offer powerful examples to policymakers on the ways social media's unique qualities can be used to strengthen democracy and the policymaking process.

Policymakers around the world are beginning to understand the positive implications of promoting greater education on engagement in society, politics, and government online, "digital citizenship" and, in particular, social media, to strengthen democratic process and offline citizenship. Two recent cases underscore the point; in both contexts, social media was a valuable resource for government officials to communicate with civilians and ensure their representation. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), WhatsApp was used in political dialogues led by the African Union in 2016. To accredit the media representatives to the dialogue process, the communications team created a WhatsApp group to share communiqués as well as other important information, including meeting programmes and schedules. The platform thus became one on which members would instantly share documents and comments about the process [59]. Further speaking to the influence and power of using social media in policymaking was the inclusion of women in Fiji's constitution-making process in 2012. Almost one-third of all the submissions to the Constitution Commission were from women thanks to the government's efforts to engage and empower them through digital inclusion tools. The final text of the Commission's draft constitution included a number of provisions that reflected the themes and positions advocated by women [59]. The examples from DRC and Fiji offer clear case studies on how social media can promote dialogue between citizens and policymakers, and the Italian government should follow their example. Examples of critical actions for policymakers endeavoring in this work are:

Create their own social media accounts if they have not yet done so; young people are more likely to rely on social media for engaging in society, politics, and government, so it has become, in many ways, the duty of politicians today to share their thoughts not only through articles in traditional newspapers or interviews on television, but also through their social media channels. The accounts do not necessarily need to cover personal matters; what is imperative is that they use the channels to complement to their work. A strong example of the point is the account of US Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, who uses her Twitter and Instagram channels actively to offer greater transparency to her work, beliefs, and occasionally to engage with her followers.

Hold national surveys and polls to gather civilian input on existing or proposed policy.

Arranging Q&As via 'live' functions (e.g. Instagram Live) with teachers in schools to help students understand policymaking in Italy, and to encourage more students to participate in civic studies, a course optional nation-wide and which many students reportedly do not attend.

Peacebuilding with Social Media

Italy's conception of social media has, over the last two decades, endured as one constructed primarily around tragedy. For the purposes of this review, a content analysis of three of Italy's major newspapers including *Corriere*, *Repubblica*, and *Il Sole 24 Ore*, was conducted and exposed that some of the most common words and phrases connected to 'social media/networking' were: cyberbullying, control, violence, suicide, crime, and pe-

dophilia.³ Although these are all legitimate concerns, the peacebuilding process in Italy against gender-based violence depends on overcoming this negativity to widen the lens on social media, and to give equal consideration to its positive implications. Considerable work addressing the roots of gendered violence operates in the online in addition to the offline dimension. It is recognised that in order to develop better preventative work on the issue, it is necessary to consider both dimensions [60].

Social media offers valuable new opportunities for activism in civil society through a greater access to political information and outlets for participation [61–65]. Through my research, I observed that the two particular case studies of *Il meglio delle donne* and *Freedra* underscore the point in Italy. The projects are alternative spaces of social formation whose work can help policymakers better understand how to endeavor in more effective preventative work against gender-based violence.

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³To collect data for this analysis, I searched through the digital archives of the three newspapers for any articles in English or Italian discussing social media between 2000–2018. Keywords for the search included: social media, social networks, digital media, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Once I collected all relevant articles, which totalled to 134, I conducted a content analysis of the materials to identify discursive trends on the topic including any patterns in tone, content, associations, and protagonists of the articles. One of the more prominent trends was the overwhelmingly negative and pessimistic tone and portrayal of social media.

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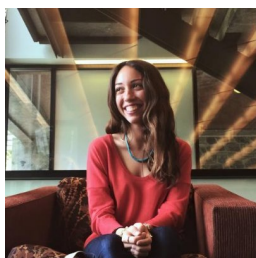
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Jasmine graduated from the University of Oxford in 2019 with a Master’s in Women’s Studies. Her dissertation interweaved her interests in digital media and



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Jasmine first began working on women’s rights during her fellowship in Cuba. In 2017, Jasmine was awarded a human rights fellowship to collaborate with the José Martí International Journalism Institute to assess grassroots mobilisation against gender-based violence in the country. For her final work ‘Aquí no hay protestas: Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Cuba,’ she was presented the award for excellence in Latin American Studies by the Pan American Association.

Growing up between New York City and Florence, and currently based in San Francisco, Jasmine is passionate about building international connections between cultures, people, and ideas. She curates a weekly newsletter, ‘The Bloom’, sharing uplifting news and developments in the world of women’s rights, as well as job postings and unique inspirations from around the world

Conflict of interest The Author declares no conflict of interest.